

# A CLOSER LOOK

Story by Greg Freeman



Sharp-shinned hawk

## FEEDER FRIGHT

Mother Nature can be cruel. While it's sometimes tough to witness an animal preying on a weaker victim, we have to remember predators are just carrying out what they are programmed to do ... search, attack, survive.

The sharp-shinned hawk is one example of a predator born with those natural instincts. Known for preying primarily on small birds, the sharp-shinned sometimes visits backyard bird feeders with the intent of finding an easy target.

Sharp-shinned hawks are one of three birds of the genus *Accipiter* found in North Dakota. They are similar to the Cooper's hawk, but are distinguished by their smaller size and squared-off tail. They nest from April to July, with the female laying four to five eggs, followed by an incubation period of about 35 days.

In North Dakota, these fast-flying predators are most often observed from early April through late September. They nest predominantly in the Turtle Mountains and wooded areas along rivers.

Sharp-shinned hawks generally avoid urban areas unless there is a reason to be there. Backyard feeders that attract an array of songbirds can provide that reason. They won't stay in one place very long. As soon as food is scarce, the search for another hunting ground begins.

Other than sitting on a perch looking for prey, sharp-shinned hawks hunt by flying through wooded areas or dense brush, trying to flush small birds into open areas and then overtaking them in flight.

Those who have experienced the intensity and precision of a sharp-shinned hawk hunting, don't easily forget it. Daphne Kinzler, professional wildlife photographer from southeastern North Dakota, whose stories and photographs have appeared in *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, watched from her house and described the experience in the March 1996 issue.

*"It walked around on the bushes stealthily, looking for prey. My suspicions were confirmed when the hawk dove down into the bushes and feathers from a sparrow began flying in every direction. I felt a sadness, yet couldn't help but admire the hunting skills of the beautiful bird before me. It had the most piercing yellow-orange eyes I have ever seen ..."*

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